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SUBJECT: Baden-Wuerttemberg Minister-President Teufel

Expected to Declare Intentions Soon

REF: A) 03 Frankfurt 10353 B) 04 Frankfurt 5551 C) 04

Frankfurt 6002 D) 04 Frankfurt 6769 E) 04 Frankfurt 7197

Sensitive but unclassified; not for internet distribution

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Recent speculation by Baden-Wuerttemberg Christian Democrat (CDU) Minister-President Erwin Teufel on a possible bid for re-election has added fuel to the state's smoldering leadership debate. Several party organizations, including the Junge Union (the CDU's youth organization), have publicly asked Teufel to retire. Former national CDU chairman (and longtime Bundestag caucus chief) Wolfgang Schaeuble has also asked Teufel to step aside. An October 19 Stuttgarter Zeitung poll showed 73% of the state's voters as favoring Teufel's retirement. Insiders predict that Teufel will be forced to decide at a CDU executive board meeting on October 30. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) In an October 4 interview with national magazine Der Spiegel, Teufel cited his high approval rating and expressed optimism that the CDU would receive an absolute majority if he ran again. Two days later, the Baden-Wuerttemberg Junge Union (JU) became the first major executive organization to call for Teufel's retirement. Several CDU county organizations joined the JU's call, and CDU labor wing president Christian Baumler also spoke out against Teufel's re-election. Although Minister Rudolf Koeberle (the state's representative in Berlin) and Social Minister Tanja Goenner support another term for Teufel, Baden-Wuerttemberg Agricultural Minister Willi Staechele recently expressed public doubts on Teufel's value to the CDU in 2006 state elections.

¶3. (U) On October 19, the Stuttgarter Zeitung (the state's leading daily newspaper) published the results of a recent telephone poll showing 73% of respondents in favor of Teufel's retirement and 19% supporting his re-election. The poll reflects the continuing downward trend of Minister-President Teufel's support among the state's voters.

¶4. (SBU) Former CDU national chairman and Bundestag caucus chief Wolfgang Schaeuble recently called for a change in leadership during an internal meeting of Baden-Wuerttemberg's 34 Bundestag deputies. CDU insiders expect the Teufel debate to dominate the party's executive board meeting in Stuttgart on October 30. Baden-Wuerttemberg press reports predict Minister-President Teufel will be forced to put his cards on the table, and some leading CDU officials are lobbying for the meeting to be held even earlier.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: Rumors of the crafty and resourceful Teufel's demise have often been greatly exaggerated. However, Teufel's mishandling of recent scandals among his FDP coalition partners and the granting of lucrative private sector jobs to retiring political allies (reftels) has accelerated the CDU's call for the longtime Minister-President's exit from office. CDU insiders compare the Teufel struggle to longtime chancellor Helmut Kohl's decision to run (unsuccessfully) for re-election in 1998 and fear that it could have similarly negative consequences for the national party, especially given Baden-Wuerttemberg's status as a perennial CDU stronghold. END COMMENT.

BODDE